

Surveys for Animal Species of Concern in Northwestern Montana

Prepared for:

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
State Wildlife Grants Program
Helena, Montana

Compiled By:

Paul Hendricks

Montana Natural Heritage Program
Natural Resource Information System
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ABSTRACT

From late summer 2003 through autumn of 2004, surveys for a diversity of Animal Species of Concern in western Montana were made possible by a grant from the State Wildlife Grants Program administered by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP). Included were stream surveys for the Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*), waterfall surveys for nesting Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*), seepage and stream surveys for Coeur d'Alene Salamander (*Plethodon idahoensis*), surveys in cedar-hemlock-grand fir forests for rare terrestrial mollusks (snails and slugs), and surveys for forest owls and rare terrestrial mollusks on Plum Creek Timber Company lands.

Surveys for Harlequin Ducks were conducted on 22 streams in eight drainage systems, and ducks were found on seven streams in five drainage systems. Twenty individuals were captured and banded. Numbers of pairs and broods on 5 streams in the Lower Clark Fork drainage were at or below minimums documented during the prior eight-year period (1992-1999) of monitoring. However, numbers of pairs and/or broods on other surveyed streams were at or above average. Streams of the Lower Clark Fork drainage may experience more extreme responses in stream flows to on-going drought relative to some other streams, such as Upper McDonald Creek in Glacier National Park.

Surveys of 32 potential Black Swift nesting sites (water falls) in northwestern Montana represented the first organized nesting survey for this species in the state. Only two nesting sites were known at the time of the surveys; nesting was confirmed at one of these (South Fork Mission Creek), and one new site was found on Haystack Creek in Glacier National Park. The numbers of swifts visiting these falls do not account for numbers seen

annually across the state, indicating that more breeding sites await discovery.

Eight historical Coeur d'Alene Salamander sites were visited one or more times in 2004; only one of these sites had been checked since 1995. Salamanders were found at five sites, all with surface water flow at the time of the visit; the other three sites were dry at the time of the visit (early September). Continued presence of Coeur d'Alene Salamanders at all sites with surface water flow suggests that this species probably persists at most or all of the previously documented locations in Montana.

Surveys for globally rare mollusks associated with cedar-hemlock-grand fir forests were conducted concurrent with salamander surveys. Five species (*Polygyrella polygyrella*, *Radiodiscus abietum*, *Magnipelta mycophaga*, *Hemphillia danielsi*, *Prophysaon humile*), documented in Montana at 1-13 locations each as of 2003, were found at ten total locations, nine of which were new. This vulnerable forest habitat deserves special protection to conserve the suite of associated rare mollusk species.

Forest Owl surveys on Plum Creek lands in three areas of ponderosa pine-dominated forest resulted in detection of four species, including a nest of Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*); no Flammulated Owls (*Otus flammeolus*) were detected. Two species of globally rare mollusks (*Magnipelta mycophaga*, *Oreohelix elrodi*) were found at one site each during invertebrate surveys; the *Magnipelta* location in Flathead County was new, one of only 13 documented for Montana.